

National SDGs Implementation in Germany and Europe

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Director Quintana, excellencies,

I would like to thank you for inviting me. I feel privileged to address this particular audience. I would like to present an overall view on the positioning of Germany and Europe to the 2030 Agenda. In the second part of my presentation I will, in short, talk you through some highlight activities of the German Council.



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Beginning with the general perspective: There is no denying the direction we are heading. Every government, company, and shareholder must confront the transformation towards sustainable development, everyone must confront climate change, everyone must confront biodiversity losses, and the other non sustainable trends.

That means, to say the least, requiring the pursuit of win-win situations when partnerships of benefit to both sides are put into practice worldwide.

For me the conclusion for Germany is quite simple, although a tough one and rich in consequences: If we do not succeed in helping other nations to do better, we are worse off. Our national interest must be to better the life of other people in order to keep ourselves from gliding into a worse form of life. Our national interest must be to restore the environment, nationally and globally, in order to keep ourselves from suffering the end of evolution. 2019, scientist established evidence that mankind has already terminated one million of species. Chances are, I think, that with regard of the next million we may count homo sapiens in.

Therefore, Germany is determined to preserve and defend multilateralism against „me-first“ attitudes, as often, and recently, expressed by our Chancellor Mrs. Angela Merkel and our President, Mr. Frank-Walter Steinmeyer.

The system of supranational institutions like the EU and [United Nations](#) were essentially a lesson learned from the second world war, and the preceding terrible decades. Germany has vowed the Never Again. Of course, those bodies require reform. But that does not call the world's multilateral structure into question. On the contrary, there is ample room to advance multilateralism if you think of the Ecosoc, the performance of regional UN bodies - all in relation to the national SDG performance of Member States. Having nations voluntarily report back to the HLPF is a success story in itself. Preparedness to act on the SDG, institutional arrangements, benchmarking participation - all this makes sense and will need further advancement. Already now, with only ten years to go for 2030, the SDG agenda needs a bold next step on delivery. The same goes with the Paris Agreement on Climate.

Germany is a great beneficiary of multilateralism, and my generation certainly is grateful that we are allowed to play a decent role in the world community. But as beneficiary, I would say that every nation could and should benefit from mutual assistance, connectedness and ambitious cooperation to solve the urgent environmental crises.

Germany, as we speak, is not unaffected from chauvinism and rightwing pressure. In fact, we are struggling and we have homework to do. I want to emphasize this.

But, I also underline that, in the past years, a couple of bold moves have transformed Germany. They are part of a general transition:

- ordering the closure of our nuclear power plants after the Fukushima disaster of 2011
- keeping the country's borders open at the height of the 2015 refugee crisis
- with the decisions taken last year and this year Germany will move away from burning coal in fossil power plants.

For Germany, 2022 will be a crucial year. 2022 will show whether we win this bet. By then, we will terminate the last nuclear power plan, and we will take out a chunk of coal powered plants. 2022 is also the year of half a century of environmentalism. Remember, the UN Environmental conference in Stockholm started professional environmental politics. 2022 is also the 30th anniversary of „Rio“.

Taken together, this makes 2022 a culmination point both in terms of excellency in environmentalism, technological competence, and culture. Rather than hailing the ashes, it must be made the culmination point to ignite the fire.

I advocate the need to upping our game. Because we can do. Judging from my experience in the German and global context, I would say, it is the audacity of hope that drives the case for sustainability. That is what encouraged me to put in an acceleration pledge that will empower practitioners in advisory through stakeholder engagement. As regards the 2030 Agenda we need more and better designed action for delivery.

Europe is existential for German interests, as well as its identity. The European idea is a peace keeper. It steered us through the euro zone debt crisis. It maintained unity in response to the trauma of Brexit.

The Commission has now come up with the notion of a Green Deal. With this, after long years of sleep, Europe is back in the bloc game. The Green Deal for Europe must be the answer to the millions of citizens, in Europe and the world, who demand action on the climate.

Yes, why not making Europe a climate-neutral geopolitical bloc by 2050? And why not transform the international trade with other continents into a mean to this end?

We should be doing what we know we can be doing. That is our call, the call of today's activists and leaders. For nineteen years now, the German Council for SD advocates this call. Therefore, I am convinced: Sustainable politics can make happen what today seems far out of reach.

- Chips should be manufactured in the European Union. Can't we not, in Europe, build up hyperscalers?
- In Europe, it should be possible to produce battery cells.
- Why don't we configure Europe to set the new global digital standards for data delivery and data economies?
- It sounds impossible, but actually the impossible is only one idea away: An automotive industry that ceases to sell (not to produce) cars because they want to retrieve their products (still cars) in order to close the circular production line, and to scale up innovation.

These are only some highlight ideas, the baseline for which is the notion that the answer to decarbonisation must be re-industrialisation rather than de-industrialisation.

Around the world and also in Germany there are people who might face a steeper path towards climate neutrality. The road of transformation to a future that is different from the mess we are in, might look daunting for some. Some are feeling left behind. I would like to put the LNOB (leave no one behind) rhetoric in question. My point is: I personally would not allow anyone to leave me behind. I do not see anybody else who should allow that. Meaning what? The first and foremost responsibility of every person, in the respective context, is to put her/himself on the positive balance score sheet.

In other words, to real inclusion and a decent life proactivity is the principal entry point.

This would lead us from mere complaining to achieving, from anger to action.

For this to happen we need better transition practices, funded and paid for. In my view, there are a lot of dedicated and committed person out there. The willingness to action is there. There are two crucial resources, though.

- One, is the audacity of hope and good ideas.

- Two, people who can work as catalyze action between the governance worlds of government, the corporate and stakeholder.

This is exactly, where advisory competences come in. Two issues are at hand, for instance:

- The offsetting of climate emissions: Where, under which conditions, how to ensure and how to register in companies score sheets? How to meet scaling up requirements?
- The balancing of social and ecosystem impacts of production and trade, and their value proposition? They are still are seen as externalities, but soon will be part of enterprises evaluation. How to benchmark scores, how to deal with supply chains and supply networks? How to cope with the verification issue?

This is uncharted territory, of course.

But we are having huge leverages. The evidence on climate risk is compelling investors to reassess core assumptions about modern finance. Sustainable development has to become a defining factor in any good and self aware companies' long-term prospects. Each company's prospect for growth is inextricable from its ability to operate sustainably. I believe we are on the edge of a fundamental reshaping of finance.

There will be a significant reallocation of capital. Actually, it is already proceeding. The Green Race is on. Long before Governments will come up with politics, green capitalists are placing sustainability at the center of their investment approach, including: making sustainability integral to portfolio construction and risk management; making ecologic and social profits and losses - those that today are being externalized and „forgotten about“ - part of the value balancing. And, still, they are capitalists. And as such, they know that markets need regulation. Capital is not the answer to money. Purpose is. This purpose is provided by the SDGs.

The „wait and see“ option is out. Every adjournment of solutions only brings the problem back as more urgent.

The German Council for sustainable development, over two decades, has become an important player in sustainability strategies, in the public as well as in the private sector.

The „street credibility“ of the Council is earned, not given. The German Council is doing its part to strengthening the commitment to sustainability and transparency in the private sector. As the Council is doing with the general public's attitude to sustainability and the commitment of the civil society, local administrators, and cultural creatives.

The Council is providing serious and reliable recommendations that are clearly north of the business of usual, sometimes visionary, but never completely on the illusionary side. Instead of just complaining we are looking into to-do options and we are trying to increase the competences of those who care about the future. The „we can“ is more powerful than the „we must“.

The Council gained its weight and wide respect predominantly through its projects. Those projects accelerate the transformation. Through strict professionalism in the governance of non-state entities the Council made itself a relevant partner for the Government and the corporate community.

That is why I engage in and sometimes created new forms of engaging the best practice in cities and on the side of private sector. This is why I facilitate the Lord Mayors Dialogue on sustainable cities

when everyone else complained about the weakness of local activism. This is why we came up with the German Sustainability Code that is providing a robust and easy accessible reporting tool for enterprises exactly when the financial and economic crisis hit (Lehman). This is why I initiated an accelerated networking of local and regional grassroots groups.

This is why I engage myself in the German Sustainability Award. With this Awards we improve the story telling and we reach out to technological excellence, dedicated leadership as well to the hearts of the people.

I am proud to tell you that, last November, I was happy to give the Honorary Award to Paula Caballero in recognition to the magic she worked in bringing the notion of Sustainable Development Goals to the attention (and action, for this matter) of the world. The German SD community owes her, and we owe Columbia that you dared challenging the world of business as usual.

I thank you for listening to me.